

Suicide Awareness/Prevention Handout

The Statistics :

- a Overall, suicide is the 11th leading cause of death for all Americans, and is the third leading cause of death for young people aged 15-24.
- b For every suicide event, the deceased leaves behind at least six survivors (family, friends).
- c The group of personnel at most risk for suicide in the Air Force are males between the ages of 17 and 24; they are usually single, recently separated, divorced, or widowed; have trouble with more than one of the following: relationships, substance abuse, finances, or legal issues.

Suicide is not the answer to life's problems. The most important role you can play while you are in the Air Force to deter suicide is to become educated in the signs and symptoms, and to seek help for your wingman if necessary.

Myths, Facts and Warning Signs About Suicide:

1. Perhaps because suicide is rarely talked about openly, there are a lot of misconceptions about issues as to who is at risk, why and under what circumstances, and about how to get help. Knowing the facts is critical to taking action and essential to saving lives.
 - a Myth: Suicide usually happens with no warning.
 - b Fact: Eight out of ten people who kill themselves give some sort of warning or clue to others, even if it is something subtle.
 - c Myth: There's always a note left behind when someone commits suicide.
 - d Fact: Actually, in most cases, there is no suicide note.
 - e Myth: Someone who talks a lot about suicide is just trying to get attention.
 - f Fact: It's just the opposite. More than 70% of people who kill themselves have previously threatened to do so or actually attempted to do so. When someone says they feel this way, take it seriously.
 - g Myth: People who are suicidal are intent on dying and feel there is no turning back.
 - h Fact: Most people who are suicidal are actually of two minds about it. Part of them wants to die, but part of them doesn't. The main thing they want is to stop their pain.
 - i Myth: People who attempt suicide once are unlikely to try it again.
 - j Fact: 80% of people who die from suicide have made at least one other attempt already.
 - k Myth: Someone who survives a suicide attempt is obviously not serious about it.
 - l Fact: Any suicide attempt should be treated as though the person intended to die, and not simply dismissed as an attention-getting device.

m Myth: If you mention suicide to someone who seems depressed, you're just planting the idea in his or her mind
n Fact: Discussing it openly can actually help, not hurt.

Warning signs of suicide:

- a Preoccupation with death or dying
- b Drastic changes in behavior or personality
- c A recent severe loss (such as relationship) or threat of a loss
- d Unexpected preparations for death such as making out a will
- e Giving away prized possessions
- f A previous suicide attempt
- g Uncharacteristic impulsiveness, recklessness, or risk-taking
- h Loss of interest in personal appearance
- i Increased use or abuse of alcohol
- j Sense of hopelessness about the future

How to Help Someone that is Suicidal

- 1 Get educated in the warning signs and symptoms of suicide
- 2 Get involved and become available, show interest and support
- 3 Ask directly if they are suicidal
- 4 Talk openly and freely about suicide
- 5 Be willing to listen without judgment
- 6 Allow for true expression of feelings
- 7 Don't debate right or wrongs of suicide
- 8 Don't lecture on the value of life
- 9 Don't dare them to do it
- 10 Don't ask "why", it could encourage defensiveness
- 11 Offer empathy, not sympathy
- 12 Don't act shocked
- 13 Don't swear to secrecy
- 14 Offer hope that alternatives are available

The Four Dimensions of Wellness

- 1 The Four Dimensions of Wellness Model is a holistic approach to human wellness. Human wellness has four dimensions: physical, emotional, social and spiritual.
- 2 Wellness is a major deterrent to suicide. A good way to look at your wellness is to imagine a grounded aircraft with wings tied down to keep it from becoming damaged in high winds. There are four tie downs to secure aircraft to the flight line. If all of those tie downs are secure, the aircraft will be able to ride out a storm with minimal damage. If one of the tie downs breaks loose on both sides, the aircraft will become unstable and possibly

sustain wind damage. Much like that aircraft if you rely on protective factors in your dimensions, you can ride out a storm.

3 If you begin to have more risk factors than protective factors in your four dimensions, you can become unstable and less capable of riding out a storm in your life. The following describes the four dimensions of wellness and explains the protective and risk factors that you may encounter in your life.

4 Balance is being able to maintain stability between your protective and risk factors in all four dimensions.

5 Physical Dimension

a Physical fitness: Physically fit individuals are better equipped for challenges in all areas of life

b Physical dimension protective factors:

- 1 Within normal weight
- 2 Balanced and healthy diet

3 Exercise program 3-4 times per week (cardio and strength)

c Physical dimension risk factors

- 1 Overweight
- 2 Unhealthy diet
- 3 Alcohol misuse
- 4 Tobacco use
- 5 No ongoing exercise program

6 Emotional Dimension

a Emotions: Internal response to our environment both physically and mentally

b Emotional dimension protective factors

- 1 Happiness
- 2 Compassion
- 3 Empathy
- 4 Good self esteem

c Emotional dimension risk factors

- 1 Anger
- 2 Fear
- 3 Sadness
- 4 Shame

7 Social Dimension

a Social connections: Interactions humans have within their environment and each other

b Social dimension protective factors

- 1 Healthy relationships

- 2 Financial stability
- 3 Good job performance
- 4 Involvement in group activities, e.g. sports activities, parent-teacher organizations, spiritual activities

c Social dimension risk factors

- 1 Family violence (current or past history)
- 2 Relationship problems
- 3 Disciplinary action
- 4 Financial issues
- 5 Mental history

- 6 Limited social connections

8 Spiritual Dimension

a Spiritual: Belief in a "higher being" and a positive force which is ultimately in control

b Spiritual dimension protective factors

- 1 Sense of faith
- 2 Sense of hope
- 3 Purpose beyond oneself
- 4 Eternal perspective

c Spiritual dimension risk factors

- 1 Hopelessness
- 2 Despair
- 3 Self-sufficiency

9 "AIRMEN- Be good wingmen. Take care of yourself and those around you. Step in when your wingman needs help. Signs of stress and suicide should not be dismissed. Take care of your wingmen on the ground so we can continue to confront America's enemies from air and space. We are the world's greatest Air and Space Power because of you, America's Airmen. The needless loss of one Airman is one loss too many. Look out for each other- look out for your wingman". General John P. Jumper, former Air Force Chief of Staff.